Sir Richard Branson: The Positively Energizing Leader

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Abstract

Amidst the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) era, the current study on positive leadership is timely. Great leaders ignite the potential within their teams, fostering so an environment where people blossom and reach their full potential. Therefore, this study delves into managing leader-follower relationships with authenticity and effectiveness in order to unlock peak individual and organizational performance. Such approach fuels individual growth and empowers organizations to flourish. In line with that, the current study analyzes Richard Branson from the positive leadership perspective as a valuable example illustrating the significance of this leadership approach. Drawing on multiple sources, the research probes Branson's leadership philosophy and conduct, aligning them with positive leadership characteristics. Examining his approach, attitude, and behavior in regard with his followers reveals a manifestation of numerous positive leadership attributes, establishing Branson as a positively energizing leader. As such, the study breaks new ground by spotlighting positive leadership through a real-life example. Apart from empirical findings and guidelines, the depiction of a positive leader in action is expected to further influence all those that also prefer learning from role models.

Introduction

One of the pillars of the organizational life and study field is leadership; the way leaders think, behave, and act. Leadership plays a fundamental role in achieving organizational goals, creating and growing business opportunities, and creating the brand and philosophy of their organizations. Leaders play a fundamental role in most performance factors related to the organization (e.g. financial performance, productivity, safety, sustainability, growth), employees (e.g. job performance, engagement, satisfaction, commitment, team spirit, synergy), and market (e.g. customer satisfaction, loyalty, service use frequency).

Leaders and organizations are continuously in search for patterns in complex systems that sometimes even seem chaotic and out of order. It often implies navigating through ambiguity, ultimately emerging with a better sense of effectual actions. The leader's duty is to empower those in his/her vicinity

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to excel and attain full potential. Applying a positive lens could be a transformative factor. Implementing principles of positive leadership leads to extraordinary performance, positively deviant results, and vitality at work (Cameron 2013).

The current study's aim is to exemplify a tangible instance of a positive leader in action through the practical example of Sir Richard Branson. After consulting and cross-referring several sources, Branson has been analyzed from the positive leadership perspective as a valuable example illustrating the significance of this leadership approach. The article outlines the leadership approach for managing the leader-follower relationship in an authentic and effective manner, thereby reaching exceptional individual and overall organizational performance. The importance of positive leadership and relational energy is grounded in the diverse effects of positive deviance observed across various dimensions. As such, thriving and extraordinary performance are enabled for both individuals and organizations. This is particularly essential in present VUCA environment.

The study begins by offering theoretical context regarding the fundamental traits of a positively energizing leader, with a particular emphasis on the concept of relational energy. Afterwards, it presents empirical findings on the individual and organizational benefits arising from such leadership approach. Subsequently, the study scrutinizes Branson's ideas, attitudes, and behavior in alignment with those characteristics. Finally, it deliberates on the insights gained from the analysis and proposes practical applications and implications for both practitioners and researchers.

1. Theoretical Background

1.1. Positive Leadership

The workplace can be a conducive setting for people to socialize and occupy a major portion of their daily routine. Maintaining suitable and positive professional relationships is extremely important for employees as it can have a substantial impact on their attitudes and behavior in the workplace. Employees' sense of belonging to an organization is linked to their performance. Leadership is able to promote favorable conduct at both team and organizational level. Implementing principles of positive leadership might result in extraordinary performance and vitality at work, since the leader-follower relationship is managed in an authentic and effective manner.

The idea of positive deviance in organizational settings focuses on how to move from good or normality to excellence, i.e. exceptional performance, thriving etc. Positive leadership (Cameron 2008, 2013, 2021) is a relatively new field within the management and organizational studies aiming to achieve such positive deviance. This leadership approach emphasizes creating a positive work environment and nurturing positive behavior, attitudes and relationships among employees as well as aligning individual and organizational goals with a sense of purpose and meaning. In the heart of positive leadership lies the concept of virtuousness, which refers to virtues of leaders such as recognition, contribution, trustworthiness, gratitude, altruism, humility, integrity, and generosity. Positive leadership involves a set of strategies and practices that can create a positive culture within an organization, which are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Key strategies and practices of positive leadership

Key positive leadership strategies	
Positive climate	Positive leaders create a climate of positivity by emphasizing positive behaviors and attitudes such as kindness, respect, gratitude, and optimism.
Positive relationships	Positive leaders focus on building positive relationships with their employees, colleagues, and stakeholders. They listen actively, emphasize and show genuine concern for the well-being of others.
Positive communication	Positive leaders use positive communication techniques such as appreciative inquiry, to facilitate dialogue and collaboration among employees. They encourage open communication and provide feedback in a constructive and supportive manner.
Positive meaning	Positive leaders help employees find meaning and purpose in their work. They align the organization's vision and mission with the individual goals and values of employees, creating a sense of purpose and fulfilment.
Key positive leadership practices	
Creating a culture of abundance	Positive leaders cultivate an abundance mind-set and vision within their organizations, characterized by a belief that there is enough for everyone, resources are plentiful, opportunities are abundant. An abundance vision creates a positive and optimistic outlook that helps unleash human potential by picturing an organization as a source of flourishing and as entity that creates legacy which people care deeply about.
Developing positive energy networks	Positive leaders focus on energizing others and identify energizers and de-energizers within their organizations so as to increase the overall positive energy at team and organizational level. They leverage energizers to create positive relationships and positive climate, and address de-energizers to reduce negative energy.
Delivering negative feedback positively	Positive leaders recognize the significance of providing feedback in a constructive and supportive manner. They implement different methods to foster and strengthen relationships even when delivering corrective or disapproving feedback. This approach helps establish a culture of ongoing learning and development.
Establishing Everest goals	Positive leaders set ambitious goals for individuals and teams to inspire them to reach their full potential and achieve extraordinary results. Such goals are positively deviant, represent goods of first intent, possess affirmative orientation, represent contribution, and create and foster sustainable positive energy.

Source: (Cameron, 2008; Cameron, 2013).

Enhancing one of the positive leadership strategies tends to positively impact the other three. Whereas, the positive leadership practices work together to enable the realization of the positive leadership strategies. Thus, there is a constant interplay between those strategies and practices as illustrated in figure 1.

Positive leadership prioritizes uplifting aspects in people and organizations, emphasizing what goes well, promotes life-giving and extraordinary elements, and aims for outcomes such as thriving at work and virtuous behaviors, with a focus on enabling positively deviant performance by positive leaders (Cameron, 2008).

1.2. Similarities of positive leadership with other leadership styles

Most leadership theories traditionally emphasize positivity, yet none offers a precise definition of what constitutes positive leadership (Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2013).
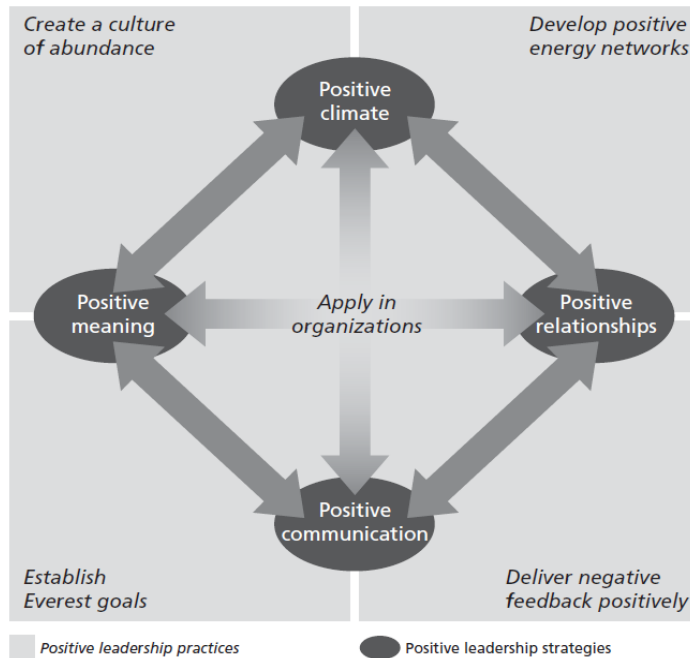
Figure 1. Interaction of positive leadership strategies and positive leadership practices.
Source: (Cameron, 2013, p. 4)

"Some of the skills and competences, which usually leaders have are positive and optimistic attitude, social and emotional intelligence, ability for lifelong learning, prudence, courage, decision making abilities, area expertise, change management skills, ability to take risk and innovate, set vision and strategy, display drive and purpose, demonstrate ethics and integrity, communicate effectively, among other skills and competences" (Blagoev & Yordanova, 2015, p. 6).

Common parallels of positive leadership might be drawn with, for instance, servant leadership and authentic leadership. Servant leadership embodies a morally-driven approach to leadership, prioritizing the satisfaction of followers' needs over the leader's personal needs (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022). Servant leaders, possessing both knowledge and ethical integrity, enhance organizations and benefit those they lead by prioritizing the fulfillment of work needs, fostering personal and professional growth, empowering employees, and demonstrating attentiveness to individual concerns (Meuser & Smallfield, 2023). On the other hand, authentic leadership refers to the authenticity of leaders in their interactions with others. Authentic leaders consistently express their true intentions, demonstrate their beliefs though actions, actively seek different viewpoints that may challenge their own, and regularly request feedback to refine their interpersonal relationships (Laschinger, et al., 2012).

While similarities might exist with the above leadership styles, positive leadership possesses unique features that differentiate it as a distinct leadership approach and theory. A positive leader is supposed to be servant

and authentic; however, those features are some of among many others incorporated into the positive leadership style. Thus, the positive leadership style discussed in the current paper goes beyond being servant and authentic. Positive leadership integrates established and emerging theories and practices with an emphasis on systematically developing and leveraging strengths and capabilities of leaders, followers, and organizations for exceptional performance (Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2013).

1.3. Relational energy

Effective leadership, originating from a leader's capability to formulate a vision, attract followers, and channel their energy towards realizing that vision, is imperative for the organization's success (Idriz & Geshkov, 2019). A key concept in positive leadership is the positive energy that enables us to perform, create, and preserve. It unlocks our internal resources and enhances our capacity to thrive. This is perhaps the most critical feature for leadership success and it is nearly impossible to lead positively without being a source of positive energy (Cameron, 2013). Positive energy is also referred to as relational energy, a concept that is defined as "a heightened level of psychological resourcefulness generated from interpersonal interactions that enhances one's capacity to do work" (Owens, et al., 2016, p. 37). Contrary to physical, mental, and emotional energies which deplete with use, relational energy grows stronger the more it is employed (Cameron, 2013; Cameron, 2021).

From the relational energy perspective, positive leadership emphasizes the importance of building positive relationships between leaders and their followers by fostering positive energy. It involves creating a positive climate that energizes employees and enhances their motivation, engagement, performance, and wellbeing. Important to emphasize, when talking about growing and managing relational energy, the weight lies primarily on the organization's leadership as a driver, supporter as well as responsible entity for this process (Dutton, 2003).

Cameron (2008; 2013; 2021) argues that positive energy in humans is in essence a heliotropic effect. Same as plants move towards sun light, human beings flourish in the presence of light or positive energy. In other words, the heliotropic effect is a phenomenon that shows that all living beings have a tendency to move from dark to light, from what is life-depleting to what is life-giving, or in other words, from negative energy to positive energy.

The study of relational energy expends upon the investigation of energizers and de-energizers (Baker, et al., 2003; Cross, et al., 2003; Quinn, et al., 2012). Leaders' impact is seen in their own energy and its contagious effect (Baker, et al., 2003; Cross, et al., 2005; McDaniel, 2011; Quinn, et al., 2012; Spreitzer, et al., 2012; Cameron, 2013; Owens, et al., 2016) on subordinates, in creating work practices for employees to efficiently recharge, utilize and increase their energy, and in promoting and empowering practices that create positive social interactions among co-workers which, in turn, are expected to increase organizational energy. Besides themselves energizing others with whom they interact, positive leaders also identify energizers and de-energizers within their teams. Energizers transmit positive energy to their environment where they work by serving as a reloading source of energy to those. De-energizers mean simply the opposite, i.e. people who sort of suck the energy from the

Table 2. Main features of positively energizing leaders.

Energizers	De-energizers
Help other people flourish without expecting a payback.	Ensure that they themselves get the credit.
Express gratitude and humility.	Are selfish and resist feedback.
Instill confidence and self-efficacy in others.	Don't create opportunities for others to be recognized.
Smile frequently.	Are somber and seldom smile.
Forgive weaknesses in others.	Induce guilt or shame in others.
Invest in developing personal relationships.	Don't invest in personal relationships.
Share plum assignments and recognize others.	Keep the best for themselves.
Listen actively and empathetically.	Dominate the conversation and assert their ideas.
Solve problems.	Create problems.
Mostly see opportunities.	Mostly see roadblocks and are critics.
Clarify meaningfulness and inspire others.	Are indifferent and uncaring.
Are trusting and trustworthy.	Are skeptical and lack integrity.
Are genuine and authentic.	Are superficial and insincere.
Motivate others to exceed performance standards.	Are satisfied with mediocrity or "good enough."
Mobilize positive energizers who can motivate others.	Ignore energizers who are eager to help.

Source: (Cameron, 2021, pp. 43-44).

people with whom they interact. Ultimately, the idea is to create as many energizers as possible and maximally reduce the number of de-energizers by utilizing effective approaches which will transform the latter into the former. Positively energizing leaders are those who are able to inspire and motivate their team members towards achieving common goals. They have a positive attitude and a contagious relational energy that uplifts and encourages those around them.

Regardless touching on the energizing effects, earlier research does not explicitly delve into the concept of relational energy. Initially, McDaniel (2011) provides a conceptual framework for the concept by defining it as a resource-driven exchange process and a universally applicable phenomenon cultural wise. McDaniel (2011) additionally created a scale to assess relational energy, focusing on the perspective of energy provider.

Later on, Owens et al. (2016) emphasize that comprehending the viewpoint of the energy receiver is vital for a thorough understanding of the energizing process and lead the way in adopting a receiver-centric approach to relational energy, by introducing and validating a 5-item measurement scale. The instrument is linked to a 7 Likert scale (7 = strongly agree, 6 = agree, 5 somewhat agree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree) and comprises the following items:

- I feel invigorated when I interact with this person.
- After interacting with this person I feel more energy to do my work.
- I feel increased vitality when I interact with this person.
- I would go to this person when I need to be "pepped up".

- After an exchange with this person I feel more stamina to do my work.

Subsequent empirical research on relational energy have mainly used this scale of measurement. It is worth noting that most of those studies , such as for instance, Amah (2017), Yang et al. (2017), Amah (2018), Amah & Sese (2018), Wang et al. (2018), MA et al. (2020), and Yang et al. (Yang, et al., 2021) center on the relationship between leaders and their team members, particularly examining how leaders' relational energy affects their subordinates.

Relational energy is nurtured through virtuous actions, the positive outcomes of which are particularly higher when such actions are demonstrated by leaders. In line with that, Cameron (2021) suggests that requiring employees to feign positivity when they are struggling emotionally can backfire, since virtuous responses, rooted in authenticity, are vital for genuine coping. Displaying virtuousness actually amplifies relational energy rather than diminishing it.

2. Empirical findings on benefits of a positively energizing leader

The credibility of positive leadership, in part, is conditional on its ability to demonstrate a link between organizational positivity and organizational performance. However, positive organizational practices result in many individual benefits for employee wellbeing too. In fact, employee wellbeing and organizational performance are interlinked with each other in the sense that the one impacts the other. Andrade & Neves (2022) contend that attaining organizational success involves more than just achieving high levels of performance; it also entails the wellbeing of employees and their commitment to the organization's benefits. Especially in recent times, spurred partly by the pandemic and advancements in technology, the wellbeing of employees has surfaced as a pivotal factor shaping company governance and strategy (Onesti, 2023).

Research (Baker, et al., 2003) reveals that, overall, there are 3 times more energizers in organizations that perform higher than their average counterparts, since energizers are themselves higher performers as well as enhance the performance of others. The approach of positive leadership leads to better individual wellbeing, physiological health, learning, and interpersonal relationships (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). Similarly, Seppälä & Cameron (2015) found that a positive workplace yields numerous advantages for the organization, such as fostering positive emotions and wellbeing, enhancing relationships, boosting creativity, bolstering resilience, and cultivating employee loyalty and strengths. Consequently, organizations of such nature attain greater effectiveness in terms of customer satisfaction, financial performance, and employee engagement.

Cameron et al. (2004) examine positive leadership practices and their impact in 7 organizations within the transportation industry. The results indicate a positive correlation between the extent of positive practices and organizational performance across 6 dimensions: profitability, productivity, quality, innovation, customer satisfaction, and employee retention. Cameron et al. (2011) find leadership practices applied in healthcare organizations having significant benefits in several dimensions: climate, manager support, participation, quality of care, resource adequacy, physician/nurse relations, voluntary turnover, patient satisfaction, and willingness to recommend. Benefits from applying positive leadership practices are also seen in

individual cases. For instance, the successes of Jim Mallozi and Charmel. the former CEO of Prudential Financial Services Jim Mallozi reduced financial losses from $140 million to $20 million in one year after switching to positive leadership practices (Cameron & Plews, 2012). The return of Charmel as the head of Griffing Hospitals and his application of positive leadership practices resulted in an extraordinary positive turn, where just in a few years, the company came from a situation of heavy losses and downsizing to a position that it was listed in the "Top 25 Best Places to Work" and in the "Top 100 Quality Award" (Cameron, 2008).

Wang et al. (2018) discover compelling evidence that leader humility has a positive and indirect effect on follower task performance, mediated by an increase in follower relational energy. According to Weng et al. (2020), relational energy plays a mediating role in facilitating the transfer of work passion from leaders to followers. Cummings (2004) argues that the relational energy exhibited by resonant nursing leaders was the driving force behind improved nursing outcomes during periods of hospital restructuring. Employees that perceive positively their relationship with the leader get more energized and, in turn, show much higher creativity (Atwater & Carmeli, 2009). Amah & Sese (2018) demonstrate that relational energy plays a significant role in boosting job engagement, an effect that is mediated by employee voice and perception of organizational support.

Various leadership styles manifest higher levels of relational energy, which in turn, mediates several positive outcomes. Amah (2017) finds that relational energy is critical in the servant leadership – high quality mentoring relationship. Similarly, Yang et al. (2017) argue that spiritual leadership positively affects job performance through the mediating role of relational energy. Wang & Xie's (Wang & Xie, 2020) findings indicate that relational energy acts as a significant mediator in the relationship between authentic leadership and emotional labor, intensifying both the positive and negative effects of authentic leadership on deep and surface acting respectively.

Leaders' ability to energize their teams is not confined solely to improving work performance; it extends further to have a positive impact on their wellbeing and even enriching their family life (Owens, et al., 2011). Relational energy serves as an organizational resource that assists engaged employees in managing repercussions of the work-family conflict (Amah, 2016).

The benefits of positivity within organizations expand beyond individual and organizational performance. The approach of positive leadership leads to better individual wellbeing, physiological health, learning, and interpersonal relationships (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). A great number of studies show that being exposed to positivity conditions produces a range of benefits such as increased life expectancy, better functioning of the central nervous system, achievement of the peak of the bodily rhythms coherence, and enhancement of the brain's gray matter (Cameron, 2008).

Finally, virtuousness, a crucial feature of a positive leader, is found to have numerous positive implications. Research has showcased the advantages of virtuousness on heart rhythms and psychological coherence, factors that appear to be predictors of longevity in life (McCraty, 2016). College freshmen that set predominantly virtuous goals (contributing to others) intend to achieve greater outcomes in physiological, social, and cognitive aspects at the end of the year than their colleagues

in whom achievement goals were dominant (Crocker & Canevello, 2016). In another study (Brown, et al., 2003), individuals that offered instrumental and emotional support to others resulted in experiencing a significant reduction in mortality, whereas receiving support did not have an impact in mortality once giving support was accounted for. Similarly, older adults who contributed to the benefit of others as compared to their own resulted in significantly lower blood pressure (Willians, et al., 2016) and mortality reduction by up to 47% (Okun, et al., 2013). Various studies show that feeling humility and gratitude results in different improvements at both individual (such as health, heart rhythms, efficiency of fluid exchange, filtration, and absorption between tissues and capillaries, longevity, and cognitive processing, flexibility, and creativity) and organizational (such as innovation, resilience, profitability, turnover, financial performance, customer retention, and downsizing) level (Cameron, 2021). Similar results are obtained also with regard to trust, another virtuousness dimension. When trust is higher within organizational settings we see improvements in productivity, managing complex situations, innovation and risk taking, feasibility of flexible work arrangements and teamwork, prosocial behavior, and unselfish service (Cameron, 2021).

3. Sir Richard Branson's leadership

Sir Richard Branson, founder of Virgin Group, is known for his unconventional leadership style. Branson is the ultimate example of a people-oriented leader who believes in putting employees first. He treats employees with respect, dignity, and praise, and creates a positive work environment that is supportive and collaborative, creating confidence and self-efficacy in team members.

Branson invests heavily in personal relationships by genuinely and authentically expressing humility and gratitude. He frequently expresses his gratitude and appreciation for the hard work and dedication of his employees. He acknowledges their contributions and creates a culture of recognition within his companies. Branson is a transparent leader who values open communication and honesty. He is known for willing to trust people as well as being trustworthy himself (McIntyre, 2012). He is also known for being approachable and accessible and encourages employees to share ideas and concerns and is always willing to listen actively and empathetically (Dearlove, 2007). Branson is known for interacting with employees and customers on a personal level, i.e. avoiding airs of superiority.

"Obviously a business is a set of people - that applies to all businesses. If you are a good leader, if you can motivate people and get the best out of them, praise people and don't criticise them, then you have a good chance of being successful. It's important that you treat everyone as importantly as your fellow directors."

(Branson, 2020).

Branson has continuously stressed that he tries to treat employees like a family, an approach reflected in all Virgin companies. Branson claims that he tries to create a sense of belonging and community within his companies; he encourages his employees to share personal stories and passions, which he believes can lead to stronger teamwork and innovation (Branson, 2014). Branson's philosophy is that companies need to first and foremost take care of employees, even before clients, since he truly believes happy

employees will themselves take care of the latter (Branson, 2009).

"For us, our employees matter most. It just seems common sense to me that, if you start off with a happy, well-motivated workforce, you're much more likely to have happy customers. And in due course the resulting profits will make your shareholders happy."

(Branson, 2009, p. 163)*.*

Branson acknowledges that his success is not solely due to his own efforts, but also due to the contribution of people who work with him. Therefore, he highlights the crucial importance of taking care of the employees. Examples of taking care of employees across Virgin companies include flexible work arrangements, opportunities and encouragement for professional development, focus on employee wellbeing, focus on diversity and inclusion, and a variety of benefit programs.

Branson's leadership style is based on the principle of empowering followers, putting their needs first and enabling to take ownership of their work (McIntyre, 2012). He consistently emphasizes the importance of empowering others and providing them with opportunities to succeed. He has created numerous initiatives that aim to uplift and support others by encouraging his team members to think for themselves and make decisions they believe are best for the company. Instead of using coercion, he opts for inspiration and focuses on people's strengths rather than weaknesses (Branson, 2009). Such attitude generates positive meaning and a sense of belonging, fostering a positive climate with a collective spirit.

"I think that where people who work for Virgin get their passion from is having

pride in the company they work for and the difference they are making. We are about people. We innovate. Let's do business like there is a tomorrow."

"We have fantastic people at Virgin, some 60,000 of them. They are committed to what they are doing and it's up to me to get out and around the world to inspire them and I am happy to do that."

(McIntyre, 2012, p. 13).

Due to his remarkable delegation level to followers, Branson radiates trust in their abilities to take ownership. As a result, such approach fosters both a sense of autonomy and responsibility, what makes people eager to excel.

Branson has a reputation for approaching challenges with an optimistic outlook and a belief that solutions can be found. This positive attitude is contagious and rubs off on those around him. Branson is a real energizer who boosts people's energy, who in turn, become capable of motivating and encouraging others (Dearlove, 2007). Branson actively pursues novel and thrilling adventures, believing life must be lived to the fullest. This passion for life and exploration is a key part of his positive energy. Likewise, Branson believes that work should be fun and that creativity is essential to success; he actively encourages a playful and adventurous spirit within his teams. (Branson, 2014). He takes pleasure in blending work and leisure and has effectively fostered a fun-encouraging culture within his enterprises. Virgin companies are known for their fund and vibrant work environments, fueled by Branson's own enthusiasm for new initiatives (Branson, 2009). He is renowned for organizing employee parties to infuse work with fun and enjoyment and for dressing up in costumes, attempting various funny

feats. Branson is also known for smiling very frequently which is visible in most of his public appearances too (Finkle, 2011).

"What Branson is really good at is creating energy around a goal – be it a business venture or a world record attempt. He exudes confidence and a belief that no mountain is too high to climb."

(Dearlove, 2007, p. 67).

"The Virgin Group had a competitive advantage that cannot be replicated, its corporate culture. Virgin's employees were high performing, fun, high energy people that were continually thinking outside the box and looking to innovate."

(Finkle, 2011, p. 110).

"I have always wanted the Virgin staff to have a great time, and I'll be the first one to make a fool of myself in any way if I think that it'll help the party go with a swing."

(Branson, 2009, p. 76).

By often incorporating humor and cheerfulness into his interactions with people he keeps things fun and approachable, which help to create a positive and relaxed atmosphere.

One of Branson's most notable leadership traits is being a risk-taker. He is famous for his love of adventure and willingness to take risks, from hot air balloon crossings to space tourism. He also often shares stories of personal setbacks and failures as lessons to help cultivating resilience and never giving up. Furthermore, he tries to hire people who are passionate about what they do and gives them the freedom to be creative and take risks in pursuit of a common goal, even if they may not always succeed (Branson, 2014). Branson believes that calculated risks are necessary for innovation and growth and believes that failure is an essential part of the learning process and an opportunity to grow and improve (Branson, 2009). Besides, Branson is always open to new ideas and is willing to adapt his strategies. He surrounds himself with people who can challenge him and help him grow. In this way he demonstrates a lack of ego and a willingness to learn from others.

Richard Branson's leadership style extends beyond merely motivating staff; it includes marketing leadership and innovation as well. Branson is well-known for his ability to disrupt traditional business models and markets, often through innovative approaches that capture the imagination of both consumers and employees alike. Branson's leadership is marked by his visionary marketing strategies that have driven Virgin Group into various industries, ranging from music and airlines to space tourism. Branson is known for his willingness to challenge conventional wisdom and experiment with innovative business models, he constantly pushes the boundaries of what's possible. His bold marketing campaigns have not only attracted customers but also inspired his employees by demonstrating the power of creativity and thinking outside the box. Furthermore, Branson's emphasis on delivering exceptional customer experiences has been a cornerstone of Virgin's success.

Despite his success, Branson remains humble. He prioritizes transparent communication with employees and encourages them to approach him directly so as to promote a feeling of accessibility. Besides asking employees to call him by his first name, he is not afraid to admit when he is wrong and is always looking for ways to improve himself and his businesses (Dearlove,

2007). Moreover, he is known for openly admitting his mistakes and failures, learning from them, and not shying away from sharing them with others.

Branson frequently goes out of his way to praise and celebrate the achievements of his followers, partners, and even competitors. He recognizes the contributions of others and avoids taking sole credit for success. One of Branson's remarkable qualities is his relatability. His capacity to mingle with people from diverse backgrounds distinguishes him from most other corporate leaders, which contributes significantly to his ongoing success and popularity.

"You've got to treat people as human beings - even more so as the company gets bigger. The moment I start to think, 'I've made lots of money, I'm comfortable, I don't need to bother with these things anymore,' that's when the business will be at real risk."

(McIntyre, 2012, p. 26).

Branson has always been hands-on when it comes to running his businesses. He is often seen working alongside his employees. Further, he often personally responds to customer complaints and ensures that his team's attitude is of best possible customer care (Branson, 2014). He is a charismatic leader who leads by example and inspires others to work harder and take pride in their work (de Vries, 1998). By leading by example he inspires his employees to be creative, innovative, and to flourish and exceed performance standards.

Finally, Branson is a visionary leader always looking for new and innovative ways to improve his businesses. He believes in making a difference in the world through his services to his customers; he always wants to offer clients something more and in a better way than others do (McIntyre, 2012).

"I think that it would be nice if Virgin can be remembered as a company that challenged the established way of doing things, and that built up a number of companies that were world leaders in their own fields. That doesn't necessarily mean being the biggest companies, but the best in that particular field. I also would like that the staff of Virgin would have very happy memories of the time that they spent working here."

(de Vries, 1998).

In addition, Branson's help and contribution goes far beyond his companies; he is a well-known philanthropist and social activist. Branson is a strong advocate for philanthropy and has donated significant amounts of his wealth to various charitable causes. He expresses gratitude for his success by actively supporting others less fortunate.

In terms of outcomes, Richard Branson's success is reflected in the growth and profitability of the Virgin Group, which has a global presence and has operated in industries ranging from music and entertainment to airlines and space travel. Branson's leadership has led to numerous successes and achievements for the Virgin Group, and eventually, himself. His personal net worth is estimated being billions of dollars and he is widely regarded as one of the most successful and influential entrepreneurs of his generation.

On the whole, Sir Richard Branson's leadership philosophy is characterized by people-orientation, emphasizing praise and trustworthiness, highlighting fun and creativity, as well as his commitment to making a positive impact on the world. He

is willing to take risks, empower others to achieve common goals, and speak out on social issues. At the same time, he values personal relationships and strives to create a sense of community within his companies. His leadership philosophy has created positive meaning, positive relationships, positive climate, and positive communication across Virgin Group, all representing positive leadership characteristics. Hence, it can be righteously concluded that Richard Branson is a typical role model of a positively energizing leader.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

The prominence of positive leadership and relational energy rests in the manifold effects on individual and organizational performance as well as on their multidimensional implications of the positive deviance they generate across numerous aspects. The positive emotions created as an outcome of positivity within organizational settings result in benefits of utmost significance in physical wellbeing (such as life expectancy, recovery after illness, cardiovascular system, immune system, hormonal system), psychological wellbeing (such as mental sharpness, quality decisions, creativity, resilience, reduced stress, learning, psychological safety, emotional carrying, self-identity), human interactions (such as helping behavior, longer marriages, citizenship activities, social skills, trust, cooperation), and individual and organizational performance (such as earnings, productivity, profitability, innovation, teamwork, employee retention, job satisfaction, motivation, engagement, organizational commitment, customer satisfaction, cost reduction).

In short, positive leadership has emerged as a vital approach in contemporary organizations. Positive leaders create a positive work environment, empower their employees, and inspire them to achieve their full potential and thrive. This approach is effective in achieving extraordinary employee satisfaction, performance, and organizational success.

The current article examined various sources to compare Richard Branson's leadership philosophy with the features of positive leadership. The analysis highlights how Branson's leadership style reflects positive leadership qualities, such as creating positive meaning, positive relationships, positive climate, and positive communication. By learning from role models like Branson, managers can develop the skills necessary to become positive leaders themselves. Furthermore, this article makes a noteworthy contribution to the literature on role-modeling leadership as well. This is especially relevant since role-modeling leadership, despite its popularity in practitioner literature, remains a less-explored concept in the scientific literature (Balwant & Singh, 2023).

In the current environment of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA) we live in, the study of positive leadership is particularly relevant. This article provides a unique perspective on the leadership style of one of the world's most successful entrepreneurs, which is expected to appeal to a broad audience, including scholars, practitioners, and students interested in leadership, management, organizational behavior, human resource management, and entrepreneurship.

The analysis draws on available sources on Branson's leadership style. However, a more in-depth inquiry could involve collecting data directly from primary sources. Further research could explore Branson's leadership style through primary data such as direct

interviews with him as well as interviews and/ or surveys with his followers and colleagues, using empirical instruments from the positive leadership field. Such research could provide additional valuable insights into how positive leadership can be effectively practiced and sustained.

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